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Mexico as Seen Through American Eyes: The Evolution of U.S. News Media Coverage

Jorge Capetillo-Ponce
University of Massachusetts Boston, jorge.capetillo@umb.edu

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Jorge Capetillo-Ponce
Assistant Professor of Sociology
Research Associate Mauricio Gaston Institute
University of Massachusetts at Boston

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1. Introduction: Two Mexican Views of the Coverage

The traditional Mexican view of the U.S. news media's treatment of Mexico and Mexicans is that those media have been mired in prejudice, owing to what Octavio Paz has called "the twin sisters ignorance and arrogance." Mexicans of all social levels have held to this view for many decades, denouncing the obsession of American journalists with drug trafficking, illegal migration, and governmental corruption, and for forming or reinforcing in generations of Americans a vague, exotic, touristy, sometimes downright surreal vision of Mexico.

This view, however, began to shift very markedly during the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994). Especially during the NAFTA negotiations (1990-1993), and after the Gulf War ended in 1991, the demise of the Soviet Union fed a growing interest in free-market issues and approaches, and the U.S. news media rushed to tie these to Salinas's "new" Mexico. Soon, the old images were being supplanted by images of: two nations moving toward many of the same goals and sharing much the same outlook; a Mexico now deeply immersed in a process of modernization; and a visionary Mexican president guiding his nation into full-fledged membership in the First World.

However, this "new" view of Mexico suffered a severe setback in 1994 with the Zapatista uprising in the southern state of Chiapas in January, the assassination of Salinas's hand-picked successor, Luis D. Colosio, in March, and especially with the peso devaluation in December, just a few days after Ernesto Zedillo's inauguration. Not only did all of the standby "traditional" issues yet again come to the fore, but during those first months of the Zedillo administration (1994-2000) many American journalists felt "burned" because they had written favorable -- often, indeed, fawning -- articles about the Salinas government, and as a result they had been widely criticized for not taking a more skeptical approach. Gradually, though, the new Mexican administration managed to cope with one of the worst economic

crises of the century, and the U.S. news media began to report on its political and economic reforms that were bringing a far more democratic culture to Mexico.

This revolutionized the Mexican news media, which rapidly turned into a free and critical vehicle of public opinion and debate. During the 1990s, a new generation of Mexican intellectuals, journalists, and politicians began to pick holes in the traditional, negative, view of the U.S. news media, as it had been fostered by such writers as Octavio Paz, Enrique Krauze, Carlos Fuentes, Jorge Castaneda, Adolfo Aguilar-Zinzer, and by other prominent Mexican intellectuals, politicians, and journalists. New voices, for example those of Sergio Sarmiento, Jorge Mariscal, and Jesus Silva Herzog-Márquez, began to insist that the U.S. news media had in fact been one of the most important external elements provoking democratic change in Mexico and in its media culture.[1]

Such a view began to gain ground in Mexico, especially after the U.S. news media's celebration of Vicente Fox's electoral victory in 2000 and the initial "friendship" between George W. Bush and Fox. But 9/11 dealt a blow to the new media vision of Mexico. American foreign policy turned its attention to fighting terrorism, looking frantically east rather than south. And after more than three years of failed efforts on the part of the Fox administration to restart talks about migration and other important bilateral issues, the traditionally jaded Mexican view of the U.S. news media had begun to reconstitute itself.

What I have provided my reader with thus far are essentially two simplistic models of Mexican perceptions of U.S. news media coverage: a "traditional" one and a "new" one. But my objective in this paper is to go beyond these two macro social views -- that usually boil down to visceral or stereotypical explanations of the coverage -- and instead focus on the construction of media texts by exploring the micro social world of the U.S. news media personnel covering Mexico. That is, I want to explain how that cultural product known as "news about Mexico" comes into being through the interaction of the U.S.

news media personnel with various sociopolitical aspects of Mexican and American institutions, and with cultural facts of Mexican life. If we first get an idea of the people these men and women talk to, the places they visit, the things they believe in, the routines that guide their work, and the conventions that govern what they write, we will gain a deeper understanding of how they look at Mexico and U.S/Mexico relations, and why sometimes they opt for the traditional, sometimes for the new vision of Mexico,

2. Methodology

My methodology is based on three elements: (1) textual analysis of 2,146 articles on Mexico that appeared in three mainstream U.S. newspapers, The New York Times (1,112 articles), The Wall Street Journal (808 articles), and The Christian Science Monitor (226 articles) between 1982 and 1995; (2) Interviews with scholars, journalists, and politicians of both Mexico and the United States; and (3) Transcripts of three conferences (in New York, Chicago, and Austin) about U.S. news media perceptions of Mexico that took place in the year 2000.

3. Ideological Factors: Objectivity and Authority

Before we start the analytical description of the interaction of U.S. news media personnel with various actors and institutions in Mexico, it is of utmost importance to offer a brief analysis of two concepts central to the American journalists' task: objectivity and authority. That journalists do try to be "objective," as all of the American and Mexican journalists that are part of this study affirm, constitutes evidence of the fact that journalists have a strong sense of the formal constraints on their work, of those rules, procedures, and traditions which are at the core of "objectivity." Reporters usually have to rely on accounts by others. Many work out of newsrooms and bureaus in main offices, since most media outlets do not have the resources allowing them to scatter reporters all around the globe. And even when reporters are in position to cover an event directly, they feel bound by "objectivity" to record what sources say has occurred rather than to venture their own version of the event. But here we encounter a

contradiction between the two roles of the journalist: one as neutral observer and another as participant. That is, the reporters' own ideological and cultural background disappears in the news through their assertion and even belief in that what they are writing is neutral and objective. Thus, the participant element in journalism, even though a very common practice, is rarely acknowledged.

News tends to emphasize conflict, dissension, and battle; and the journalistic convention that there are at least two sides to any story accounts for the way most articles go out of their way to find conflict even in instances of relative consensus. But even though in many cases there are not really two sides to a human event, adherence to this convention is at the heart of the average American journalist's credo. This point is stressed by Tim Padgett, Newsweek's correspondent in Mexico for many years, who asserts that there is a "rule" in Newsweek and in Time as well.

> For example, on a story we did in Newsweek back in 1995, when we were talking to Mexican and U.S. drug agents who were beginning complain after Raul Salinas [the brother of ex-president Carlos Salinas] went to jail that he had been involved with drug traffickers and you know, the rule process was that we needed two separate U.S. official sources before we could begin to consider the legitimacy of those kinds of complaints. And also on the Mexican side. We have to have at least two what you consider reliable official sources; corroborate sources. We have a sort of network of corroboration, so you don't just go on producing a story about one guy just cocking off on Raul Salinas. You had to try to create a network of people telling more or less the same kind of complaint about Raul.[2]

This business of putting together a "network" of sources is one of many indications suggesting that American journalism puts the emphasis on strategy and tactics, the mechanical over the ideological. Focusing on the technical enables the journalist to conceive of herself/himself as "professional," thereby

remaining aloof from the conflicts of interest, perspective, and value that are the "dangerous stuff" of political life, and of reporting in general.

Herbert Gans, in studying the issue "who is news," distinguished between the Knowns (political, economic, social, and cultural elites) and Unknowns (ordinary people). Gans found in the newspapers, magazines and TV news shows he studied, that the Knowns make the news roughly four times as often as the Unknowns. Presidents and those who surround them (ministers, advisors, congress people, and so on) are most prominent. One can see, then, how the need to establish "objectivity" converges with today's cult of personality, the result being that reporters who strive to legitimate their stories by endlessly seeking out the reassuring words of "authoritative" public sources; this means, usually, high placed government officials and a relatively small number of "prestigious" experts. Views at the margin receive little coverage because they lack not validity or interest, but official sponsorship. Thus one could make a good case that news is as much a product of sources as of journalists. For example, Andrew Rosenthal, foreign editor of The New York Times, points out that

> Most of the stories we have written about drugs and official corruption in Mexico have been less about The New York Times uncovering official corruption in Mexico than about our coverage of, generally speaking, American investigations of them. . .People are always trying to read a lot of messages into what newspapers do. In many ways, in newspapers and wire services, in television news shows, and in the whole news industry, mostly we react. Sometimes we direct and sometimes we influence, but mostly we react.[3]

Anyone not holding office in an established institution or recognized group has a weak claim to authority in the eyes of many journalists, and yet in mass movements or in riots there may be no one in authority. In such cases the journalist's habit of turning to authorities in other institutions for information -- police

officers, soldiers, social scientists, politicians -- ends up giving a voice to the very institutions under challenge from mass movements. The initial U.S. news media coverage of the Zapatista uprising in the Mexican state of Chiapas is a good example of this problem, the result being that inaccurate information gained wide currency.

On the other hand, this process of ordering that the news media engage in, according to perceived levels of authority and prestige, creates a picture that renders society and politics (and this is especially true in the case of a large and complex society such as Mexico's) far more orderly, simple, and directed than it actually is for the participants, and above all for members of the group described.

4. The U.S. Correspondents in Mexico

The ideological elements described above are relevant to understand the construction of media texts by U.S. news media personnel involved in the coverage of Mexico and Mexicans. But they are not determining factors. There are other factors such as social networks, location of offices, the influence of editors, the sources correspondents rely on, and the politics behind the news, that are just as important.

Let's start with the correspondents, since they seem, at first glance, to be the main protagonists of the process of construction of news. Practically all of U.S. correspondents are based in Mexico City, and they travel out of the capital only sporadically, and then only to cover a particular event rather than to gain a better understanding of what goes on in other parts of the country. According to David Nájera, the former Director of International Press at Los Pinos (the Mexican White House), there are around 300 foreign correspondents registered with the press office, 40 percent of them American.[4] At the beginning of their stay in Mexico, most foreign correspondents focus on providing their readers or viewers with "folkloric" perspectives of Mexico; that is, they begin by doing stories on cuisine (mole, tacos, and the like) or

popular music (Mexican rock, the Garibaldi Plaza in Mexico City) but then move on to other type of stories, gradually specializing in a particular sector of Mexican life.

To get a sense of overall U.S. coverage of Mexico, we must begin by recognizing that only a relatively few U.S.-based media operations have a person or persons working full-time in Mexico. We are talking about the wire services, the big broadcasting and cable companies, national newspapers such as The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, and The Chicago Tribune, and finally news organizations in border states, such as The Dallas Morning News and the Houston Chronicle, where there is a stronger interest in Mexico as a result of the immigration and border issues. The case of Christian Science Monitor, with one correspondent in Mexico who also covers other Latin American countries, describes the situation of most U.S. media outlets in Mexico.

That numbers do matter is made clear for us in this remark by Esther Schrader of the Los Angeles Times: "A lot of it [the coverage] has to do with the number of people covering Mexico and what they can humanly do. You put one correspondent in a country like Mexico, as in my case when I was down there covering Mexico and Central America and the Caribbean, writing about one story a week, because that was the appetite that my editors had. And you are not going to be able to cover much of what is happening in Mexico. But what we tried to do obviously was pick and choose and filter. Sometimes it worked, and sometimes it didn't. " [5]

Given, then, both the huge geographical area that just one correspondent often is made responsible for, and the huge pressures that s/he is under in that and many other regards, it is understandable why so much of the reporting on Mexico focuses on only a limited number of aspects of the country. David Nájera points out, for instance, that the reason foreign correspondents emphasize the coverage of drug trafficking is that they are covering all of Latin America and with "every new situation they have to travel outside

Mexico. When they return to Mexico, what is the subject they can handle easily? It is drug trafficking, it is violence, law-enforcement-related problems, and so on." But it is not necessarily the political process, "because they would need to keep in contact with a lot of people to make investigative journalism, and they don't have the time. It is very easy to cover drug traffic, because it is going to be well received by editors, and they don't have to work too much. And that affects the quality of the reporting." [6]

4. The Editors

The influence of editors upon the correspondents' pieces is another factor that influences the final text. Editors have certain expectations of coverage that often clash with the correspondents' own view as to what is important. Compounding the difficulty is most editors' lack of international vision. Bruno Lopez, Vice President and Content Director for Univision (Austin), points out that "most editors we now deal with lack experience and have done little travel; they haven't been exposed much to foreign news, with the exception of those companies who have a tradition of only promoting as editors those who have experience abroad." [7]For López, today's highly "packaged" news formats spring to no small degree from editor's lack of interest in foreign news, and an obsession with local news (this is, obviously, before 9/11, when foreign news, particularly from countries in the Middle East such as Iraq, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Iran, and in Central Asia, such as Afghanistan and Pakistan, invaded American homes).

Even though the lack of interest by editors on international news dramatically changed after 9/11, the main grievance of today's foreign correspondents persists: that their news editors insist that they should package their pieces as entertainment. As López points out, "we are now being asked to present and enhance information to the level of 'providing an experience,' a demand which goes beyond just writing a good story. Even the New York Times, which used to proud itself on not following the pedestrian ways of papers like US Today, have found themselves amidst advertisement campaigns, claiming they can transport their readers throughout the world." [8]

Needless to say, all of this looks much different from an editor's perspective. Editors think of their relation with correspondents as a balanced process of negotiation and consensus-building, and of themselves as guiding their people through the political minefield in international reporting, while keeping the best interests of their correspondents in mind. Tim McNulty, foreign editor of The Chicago Tribune, points to the responsibility of editors of studying the trends in international reporting, and implementing an editorial policy for the correspondents:

> You can't humanly do the best coverage when there are few correspondents around the world; when you have to be somewhere and also you have to cover breaking news as well as whatever else you think it is important there in a particular region. The one thing that we have tried to emphasize more and more with the foreign correspondents is that we don't care so much about the daily events. We have the wire services. And we try to discourage correspondents from covering those kinds of stories. Say, rather than going and spend the time to do a piece of news, we try to have more depth in our coverage; make it a little bit more texture involved. [9]

The problem for a foreign correspondent isn't just that, like all reporters, they are fully aware of the editor's power to decide which news piece to promote and which to drop. They also have seen how editors thousands of miles away can become enamored of one personality or event because it is "selling well" in the United States, and thus grow resistant to reports not in keeping with the image of that person or event they already have in their minds. The perfect example here, of course, is the image of Carlos Salinas as the prototypical Third World modernizer and reformer. As Tim Padget of Newsweek points out:

> It was easy to sell stories about the Salinas administration to our editors and our readers because Salinas was perceived to be "just like us." And it became very hard, once our editors were in that

mindset, to sell unfavorable stories about the Salinas boom. For example, I remember when we all started looking into this phenomenon of 24 billionaires suddenly popping up in Mexico, the fourth largest number behind the U.S., Japan and Germany. . . And an editor at Newsweek spiked it, because he felt that given the impressive boom and economic achievements of Salinas it really was not appropriate...We were in the positive cycle about Mexico at that time. And that positive cycle was broken immediately by the peso crash -- and then it became hard to write anything positive about Mexico, because suddenly all our editors were completely pissed off. And when they said, "Where were all you guys? Why didn't you tell us about the weaknesses in the Mexican economy?" We all said, "Because you didn't want to hear about it.". . One other story I remember: I was having troubles getting my editors to pay attention to the peso crash. I would offer this or that story and they would say that it was boring. And finally I found out that the peso crash was affecting the "casa chica" in Mexico. As you know, the "casa chica" is the Mexican term for mistress--the "little household." And my editor said, "What do you mean?" I said that because of the peso crash, all of the men known as "licenciados" did not have the disposable income anymore to support their casas chicas. And he said, "That's a great story! Mistresses are in unemployment lines!" So I went ahead and wrote the story; and I can't say I was completely comfortable writing that story. . . The point here is that that was they way that I was able to get the peso crash story into the pages of Newsweek back then--through this rather strange angle.[10]

The above quote illuminates a key conflict between correspondents and editors, and it is an example of the conflict over the flow of information and dissemination of media products. The editor has the pressures of the news market in mind, where Salinas, at that time, was a poster boy for modernization, while the correspondents had a first hand knowledge about the specific nature of a problem. In fact, Padgett was forced to find an entertaining, and literally "sexy" angle in order to report on such a really quite "objective" fact of life as the peso crash.

Other correspondents see this attitude by editors as eroding the ideological element so intimate to the correspondent's task, namely objectivity. For example, Geri Smith of Business Week, thinks that editors are getting between reporters and the all-important element of "objectivity": "There have been more pressures from my editors to do many more analytical pieces. They don't want just more straightforward coverage of what is happening. They want to know why. They want to know the implications on both sides of the border, and so this has led in my particular case to many more commentaries, where I have to drop my years of journalistic objectivity and actually draw conclusions for the readers." [11]

It also should be noted that sometimes the cultural differences between Mexico and the United States render almost silent the conflict over stories between editors and correspondents stationed in Mexico. A good example here is the 1999-2000 controversy about higher tuition at UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico). As Miguel Basañez and Andrew Rosenthal have pointed out, if Americans are unable to contextualize a story, even if the correspondent in Mexico feels "this is the story" it probably isn't one for a U.S. audience. In this case of UNAM, Americans are not used to thinking about college tuition as an important issue. But a three-hundred-thousand-student university would be the equivalent to a one-million-student university in the United States. The only comparable institution in the U.S. would perhaps be the U.S. Army. Thus even if in Mexico anything that happens at UNAM is front-page news, one can only agree with Andrew Rosenthal that "these kinds of issues are very hard to translate." [12]And this cultural difficulty in translating an event might reinforce the traditional view that the U.S. news media doesn't understand or care about Mexican issues.

5. The Sources

We have noted that reporters seldom are in a position to witness events first-hand. And because they have to rely on accounts by others, who reporters talk to tells us a lot about the news. Experts are needed

because reporters tend to confine their research to newspapers and periodicals, downloads from the Internet, and sometimes official documents obtained through ministries or police departments. Given all of that, it comes to no surprise when we find that what journalists consider "hardness" of information is virtually synonymous with authoritativeness of sources.

While I have found in my research four basic degrees or levels of authority and legitimacy with respect to both Mexican and U.S. sources used by the selected newspapers, it must first be noted that invariably there is a higher degree of authority assigned to the U.S. sources; this being all the more true at times of crisis seen as directly affecting U.S. interests, such as the Camarena (a DEA agent assassinated in Mexico) affair of 1985 and the 1994-5 peso crisis. That said, the four levels are these: (1) government officials, from the President on down in both countries; (2) the most authoritative and well-known Mexican and American political and economic commentators, journalists, scholars, and intellectuals; (3) sources who, although not as well known as those in the previous two groups, have long track records of contributing to each newspaper. Some of them fall into the category of "stringers," those who "prepare" the news piece for the correspondents. They usually are "inherited" by the new correspondents in Mexico as part of a social network to which the new correspondent is introduced by the outgoing one. In the case of the American sources they usually are either syndicated columnists or experts who cater to the ideological agenda of each publication. (4) Lastly, there is a fourth category: the "man on the street." These Unknowns, as Gans calls them, make their voices heard now and then in the U.S. news media.

In the first pool of sources we have the President, the Secretaries, the Under-Secretaries, and other high-placed officials and advisors; the various governmental, corporate, and political-party spokespersons; and so on. Among the prestigious sources found in the second pool are the following. From Mexico: Octavio Paz (until his death in 1998), Carlos Fuentes, Carlos Monsivais, Jorge Castañeda, Enrique Krauze, Adolfo Aguilar Zinzer, Federico Reyes Heroles, Sergio Aguayo, Lorenzo Meyer, Hector Aguilar Camín,

Federico Estevez, Rogelio Ramirez de la O, Homero Ardijis, Jorge Bustamante, Luis Rubio, Miguel Angel Granados Chapa, Sergio Sarmiento, Denise Dresser, Raymundo Riva Palacio, Abel Beltrán del Rio, and Soledad Loaeza. From the United States: John Bailey, Sidney Weintraub, Susan Kaufman-Purcell, Roderic Camp, Wayne Cornelius, Robert Pastor, and Jorge Dominguez.

With respect to those 21 Mexican commentators just listed, it should be noted that only the first fifteen or so were heavily relied upon in my study. We have here a clear difference in degree of authority, at least as perceived by the American correspondents and editors who cover Mexico. As President of the Inter-American Dialogue, Peter Hakim notes: "U.S. reports rely on only a few Mexican commentators. There are a half dozen or so of them, and I will not mention their names here. They speak English, and have easy access to a large number of reporters and news media. They tend to predominate in the news, and they have very strong views. In other words, rather than moderate, they tend to come down very strongly on one side or the other." [13]

In my study of the coverage of Mexico by the three selected U. S. newspapers, The New York Times had the widest range of sources. It also should be noted that in addition to the above-mentioned sources, the NYT would consult sources having expertise in particular areas. During the Chiapas uprising, for example, the writer Andre Aubry and the Nobel Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú were quoted in various pieces; for electoral processes, Juan Molinar, José Woldenburg, and Miguel Basañez were the choices; and especially during the NAFTA debate years, businessmen like Carlos Slim and Roberto Zambrano and financial experts like Nora Lustig and Alan Stoga were consulted. Especially during the 1980s, the NYT had a special relationship with Jorge Castañeda (ex-minister of foreign affairs and presently a candidate for the Mexican presidency in the 2006 elections), not only as a source but also as a writer of opinion pieces that appeared with some regularity during that decade. On the U.S. side, the scholar Harley Shaiken and President of the Inter American Dialogue, Peter Hakim, were consulted on a few occasions.

The Wall Street Journal is notable for having had far more numerous American sources than did the other two publications, especially financial experts. Also, its U.S. focus was more on corporate heads of such financial institutions as Goldman Sachs, Citibank, Nafinsa, IBM, and Chase, than on government officials. So too, in Mexico the WSJ gave voice to the heads of large corporations such as Carlos Slim, Roberto Zambrano, and Emilio Azcárraga, and to the heads of the various financial sectors of the government. Its financial experts were, on the American side, Luis R. Luis, Nora Lustig, Mauricio Bello, Mauro Leos, Delal Baer, Simon Nocera, Borja Ussia, Jonathan Heath, and Alan Stoga, and on the Mexican side, Martin Moreno, Robles Gil, Eduardo Medina Mora, Jorge Suárez-Velez, Salinas de Leon, Salvador Sanchez Garcia, and Agustin Colmenares. Other Mexican sources who were tapped from time to time were the journalist and politician Adrian Lajous, and especially the historian Enrique Krauze and the journalist (and member of the family that owns the Mexican newspapers El Norte and Reforma) Alejandro Junco. Finally, the American scholar Raymond Vernon was consulted on a few occasions, and Tijuana-based American writer Dorothea Eiler wrote a few opinion pieces about the changes being seen on the U.S.-Mexico border during the NAFTA-debate years.

When viewed standing by the dominating side of the NYT and even the WSJ, the Christian Science Monitor (CSM) had a much reduced pool of sources. When going beyond its two regular American contributors on Mexico, Richard Seid and Andrew Reding, the CSM occasionally turned to American experts Morton Palmer, Dennis Volman, and William LeoGrande and especially the scholar Roderic Camp. On the Mexican side, and in keeping with the CSM's liberal interests, the CSM's readers heard from figures (such as Sergio Aguayo) in the Mexican NGOs Civic Alliance and The Academy of Human Rights. During elections, Juan Molinar and José Woldenburg, were consulted. Martin Goebel was the choice for pieces on the environment. Also noteworthy is the fact that the CSM distinguished itself from the other two selected publications by doing more "man on the street" reporting in Mexico.

Across all three of the selected publications, close to 60 percent of the articles I analyzed contained at least some information garnered from the first type of sources described above, it being transmitted for the most part through such routine gathering channels as press releases and press conferences. This aspect of news-gathering has led Michael Schudson to say that it is often " a matter of the representatives of one bureaucracy picking up prefabricated news items from representatives of another bureaucracy." [14]

In any case, while most readers remain faceless, reporters must deal with their sources again and again. They need their feedback, their telephone tips, their criticism, corrections, comments, their introducing them to other sources, but sometimes get also complaints, denials, outrage. Many times, sources are used to "objectify" what the journalist already knows. The problem here in respect to "objectivity" is that when journalists turn to experts to reinforce a view on things, they do not tell us that these experts are not always disinterested. In fact, in the case of certain governmental and political organizations, departments and positions are often created for the sole purpose of providing journalists with explanations, what James Carey calls "institutes of explanation," available for every problem a journalist confronts. [15]

As we can see from the analysis above, an American correspondent interacts with a great diversity of abstract and concrete aspects when arriving in Mexico. This is even more obvious if s/he does not represent an important newspaper such as the NYT or the WSJ, or a major television or cable network. The representatives of these media organizations have a sort of most-favorite-media status. But even in these cases, as Bruno López from ABC tells us, you can run into trouble with a powerful politician that can obstruct your access to first-hand information. Lopez points out, about Salinas's staff, that "his press attaché was Otto Granados. And I wrote a story on how they couldn't hire any Mexicans who wanted to go greet Salinas in Los Angeles, so they hired Guatemalan workers. You know: *"Bienvenido Presidente. Lo queremos. La patria es primero"*. And Otto Granados really disliked me after that. So basically for the

first three years of the Salinas government I had no access. And the other ways you can go around and get access is to build sources at a lower level. . . And those people really have decent access to a lot of information. . . So maybe I was not in the *giras* [presidential tours] with Salinas, or I was not invited to the parties or the briefings, but still I got my information. [16]

Here we arrive at a complaint from American correspondents about the "negative" attitude of Mexican officials. It is one of those cultural factors that have originated, according to most American correspondents interviewed for this study, the unbalanced quality of certain pieces on Mexico. They claim that, although the term "spin doctor" might seem to be uniquely American, in many ways it describes press officials in Mexico. Because in Mexico the reporter knows that any information s/he obtains will have been "filtered" through the different levels of the government bureaucracy. In other words, the "official" source in Mexico is usually a highly guarded or even unwilling one. Susan Ferris of the Dallas Morning News makes this point clearly:

> It really is a sort of frustration when you are trying to get their point of view and you really are holding your story on deadline, and you are making an effort, and you just constantly hear: *"El licenciado no está"*, (the boss is not here) or *"el licenciado salio"* (the boss is out). You have to make a choice, because you just are going to have half of the story without them. One of the good things that I think is happening in Mexico, as part of the whole flux of change, is that those voices are not the only voices in Mexico anymore. And you can now go to an opposition Congress where people are not afraid to speak up and you can talk to analysts who are not afraid to say what they really. [17]

Still, this aspect of U.S. correspondents going continuously to government officials sometimes is seen in Mexico as a U.S. news media obsession with official sources, and is a point of debate between American and Mexican journalists and media analysts, as José Carlos Lozano points out:

> I am not going to defend politicians in Mexico. But foreign correspondents had shown good ideas on how to handle this problem by going to non-governmental sources and, for example, you can see now this group of political analysts in Mexico that are willing to talk to foreign journalists. In Tijuana, for example, you have the *Colegio de la Frontera Norte,* with some very important researchers there that could be interviewed to talk about the economic issues, the border issues, the *maquiladoras*, or whatever. So I think that . . . we can open also the sources that reporters are going to for the news. And maybe it could be healthy to open up that access to political analysts in Mexico beyond, you know, Federico Reyes Heroles, Lorenzo Meyer, and Adolfo Aguilar Zínzer and all of them that are very important. They have a lot of credibility inside Mexico, but they are not the only guys able to talk about the different issues that are important to Mexico. [18]

Through their habit of not being accessible, U.S. correspondents argue, Mexican official sources all too often "force" American correspondents to write a story citing only U.S. sources as corroboration. Thus, this "bad Mexican habit," according to U.S. correspondents in Mexico, has as a result an imbalanced, prejudicial, and yet widely influential coverage of Mexico. Thus, what is considered a "bad habit" by American correspondents in Mexico reinforces negative or "traditional" views, in Mexican eyes, about U.S. news media coverage of Mexico.

The result, according to most American correspondents in Mexico interviewed for this study, is that they are forced to rely more on U.S. "official sources." But at least some of this damage is undone through the Mexican press itself. Indeed, it exerts a powerful influence on what finds its way into U.S. news. The

interaction between Mexican journalists and their American counterparts stationed in Mexico is a complex one. They teach American correspondents the fine art of *'leer entre lineas'* (to read between the lines), that is, to spot those hidden stories in the Mexican political discourse, that only an individual immersed in the culture of a country can actually bring to light. David Welna, the U.S. National Public Radio correspondent in Mexico for many years, makes this point even more clearly:

> We depend a lot on our Mexican colleagues for informing us about many things that are going on. I read usually three papers a day. And, at the same time, I guess I was most acutely aware of the difference between the domestic correspondents and the foreign correspondents taking into account in things like, say presidential trips. In such occasions we, foreign correspondents, received a much more preferential treatment than Mexican journalists. That is where the division really became apparent. And until this very day, that is also a distinction that you can see in the way each kind of correspondent -- whether foreign or Mexican -- makes questions to the government officials or the President. Foreign correspondents are the ones more willing to ask uncomfortable questions. The foreign correspondents are seen as the thorn in the side, and maybe that comes from a distinct culture of journalism. Bu we have had a tremendous debt to the domestic reporters. They lay the groundwork for a lot of what we do." [19]

This politics of "press apartheid" has its origins in the Mexican government's acknowledgement that the U.S. news media now occupied a central space in the country's internal debate, and more importantly, in the projection of Mexico around the world, a crucial issue in the Salinas administration's efforts of selling NAFTA and the "new" Mexico. Thus, Salinas projected the idea that he was "open" and so willing to talk to the foreign press that he tended to favor the foreign press over the local press. Business Week's Geri Smith thinks that was "an error and that is still a problem in Mexico that will come back to haunt the government, because foreign journalists rely far more on the local press than most people realize. . .That

is our source of news; our list of news items for the day comes from the Mexican newspapers. We all have our story generation methods, but we all look at the local papers every day." [20]

This intimate relation between American and Mexican journalists account for the emergence of a "new" view on U.S. coverage of Mexico. That is, if foreign journalists have indeed leaned heavily on their Mexican counterparts, there is also a debt owed by Mexican media to their U.S. colleagues. Both Welna and Smith have pointed out, for instance, how the foreign correspondents serve a valuable function by asking those tough questions that the Mexican reporter generally doesn't dare to address. And precisely because the historical relationship between the Mexican press and the Mexican political regime has been characterized by a very clear and powerful control of the former by the latter, the foreign press has been able to make a valuable "democratizing" contribution that is now being recognized.

This is how the political commentator Jesus Silva-Herzog Márquez has put it, when looking back at the Mexico of the 1980s and early 1990s: "the foreign press in Mexico appeared to be one of the few reliable sources to know not only about the outside world, but also about Mexico. And even for the Mexican press it was helpful to receive the information from The New York Times or The Wall Street Journal, because it was a sort of 'news laundering' in the sense that something that could be troubling for the Mexican press to publish could be somehow protected if it came from the foreign press." [21]

This complex relationship between the news media outlets in both countries, and indeed the great difference in the two media cultures, becomes even more complex when we insert the element of Mexican nationalism into the equation. Virtually all of the interviewed American correspondents said that at one time or another they have come up against what they perceive to be an "exaggerated Mexican nationalist sentiment." Most agreed than even on occasions when they wanted to write about a positive change going on in Mexico, their sources often would not talk to them about it owing to their

preoccupation that their talking would be perceived as *"otra violación a la soberanía nacional"* (another violation to national sovereignty). All the more striking to the journalists was the fact that this nationalist fervor, which they tended to equate with an anti-U.S. feeling, was present in all sources, from government officials to the private sector, from journalists and scholars to the "man on the street."

Related to this issue of Mexican national sovereignty is the extremely problematic one of "unnamed sources" -- individuals who for various reasons, nationalism being only one of them, do not want their identities revealed to the public. The problem with unnamed sources is that although they can figure as the central evidence reinforcing the point of a story, the fact that the identity is not revealed to the public makes the reliability, authority, or legitimacy of the source problematic. Thus we are left only with the correspondents' and/or editors' implicit insistence that we can trust them, because they know s/he is a "good" source. The foreign editor of the NYT, Andrew Rosenthal, elaborates on this matter:

> The fact of the matter is that we do use a lot of unnamed sources. . . In a lot of these cases, though, the sources we are not naming provided us with documents that form the substance of the stories. If we named the people who gave us these documents they would be fired; some of them would be killed. It is a really dicey situation.. . And I think, generally speaking, [it is justified] if somebody is giving you information that is of great public value and certainly in my mind, important information that the government does not want you to know almost always falls into the category of protecting their identity. . . We had a huge ongoing discussion about a Mexican government official...in which all kinds of allegations were made. And it was the old sort of story linked to narcotics trafficking, which can be almost anything you care to name. And we said: "Substitute the name of this person with that of the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury or the Secretary of Defense -- which was more appropriate in this case -- or the Chief of Staff in the White House. Would we run this story? Would this story meet our standard not just of sourcing,

> but of relevance? And sometimes we decide not to. I think it is valid to say that the American media tend to run allegations of bad behavior by foreign officials more readily than they do of American officials. I think that is probably a fair observation. [22]

Again, this quote is very revealing of the habit on the part of the U.S. news media outlets of making allegations against the Mexican government or Mexican society in general, using unnamed sources as the prime support. It is precisely this habit which arouses so much concern and ire among Mexico's politicians, scholars, and journalists. For them it constitutes a clear "proof" of U.S. prejudice against Mexico, thus reinforcing in Mexicans the "traditionalist" view of the U.S. coverage of their country.

There is no doubt that on various occasions unnamed sources have in fact been used to accuse Mexican officials of corruption and/or drug trafficking. When in 1983 former president de la Madrid went to Washington for an official visit, for instance, the day of his arrival the Washington Post published an article by Jack Anderson. This quoted unnamed sources as saying that de la Madrid had millions of dollars stashed in a Swiss bank account. More recently, during the Zedillo administration, unnamed sources "fingered" various high government and military officials, and even Zedillo's private secretary, Liébano Saenz, as guilty of drug-money-laundering and other illegal activities. Both stories were eventually disproved. The point is, that the raising of such "hot" allegations were not followed by what became of them, and getting "burned" in this way has helped American journalists and editors to recognize that from time to time an unnamed source is going to be playing her or his own political game. And yet, since unnamed sources are simply indispensable at times, the best way for journalists and editors to counter their "hidden agenda," according to Andrew Rosenthal, is to simply follow up on and research their tips, and to "try no to take what you get totally at face values." [23]

One better understands, however, the appeal of unnamed sources, when one becomes aware of how problematic can be "official U.S. sources" which the American correspondent in Mexico also has to deal with. These include the American embassy in Mexico, the DEA, the FBI, and the State Department, among many others. A high percentage of stories, especially those pertaining to the all-important issues of drug trafficking, illegal migration, and corruption, are brought to life by initial contact with a report issued by U.S. law enforcement sources. Here we do see a clear bias at work, in that the search for a story inevitably becomes linked to the interests of a particular U.S. agency. And this sort of bias clearly matters, since much of the perceived nationalism and "over-sensitivity" of both the Mexican government and the general public arises out of a need to continually be on the defensive against what they perceive as hurtful U.S.-news-media-engendered allegations and distorted images of their country.

At any rate, the U.S. correspondent working in Mexico has to deal with the fact that each agency has its own agenda and attitude vis-à-vis Mexico. The U.S. embassy, for example, is considered by most American correspondents to be a not very reliable source, "because they are either too favorable, as in the Salinas era, or they are too grumpy about Mexico, as after the peso crash. "[24]. And when it comes to other U.S. agencies, they often not only differ widely in their "Mexico agendas" but even work against each other, as Andrew Rosenthal of the NYT argues:

> The story of the American/Mexican law enforcement effort on drugs -- and there are some people who will say that "effort" is a rather grand word -- is one in which there are real differences among these agencies. The DEA tends to be much more aggressive. They tend to think the situation is worse than other agencies do. Certainly a lot worse than the State Department, which I am not sure what exactly it would take for them to say there was a problem. I think they would have to actually find somebody at Foggy Bottom selling drugs. And the FBI

also takes a different view on these things. And you can get caught in the cross-fire between various law enforcement agencies. [25]

Whereas all of the sources we have looked at thus far have been with us for decades, and in some cases centuries, two other are distinctively of our own times. First, we have all of the Mexican NGOs that have sprung up in all sorts of areas: civic issues, electoral processes, environmental causes, indigenous rights, and so on. They have become a main source for foreign correspondents, a component of their social networks particularly effective on issues not being covered properly or even being completely ignored. The second distinctively new source is the Internet. Useful as it is to the foreign correspondents based in Mexico, perhaps even more striking is the fact that publications can now cover a country outside of the United States from a distance. More specifically, a newspaper can make a commitment to cover Mexico without deciding that it needs a person full-time on the ground in there, twelve months a year. All of this has been made possible by the fact that all of the major Mexican newspapers publish online, daily. There now available seventy general-market newspapers on-line from Mexico, and another other forty-plus specialized publications -- plus radio stations and television networks. [26]

6. The Politics Behind the News

If we wish to understand the construction of the news, we need more than knowledge of the correspondents' relations with their editors, their social networks, and the sources they rely on for getting information. The additional vital element is an understanding of the politics behind the news, the bureaucratic intrigue that affects both what a story will say and how and why and (whether) it makes its way into the paper. The questions here can be very complex or as basic as "which source leaked it, and why?" We must begin here with the simple fact that Herbert Gans' "Knowns" have a continuous preoccupation with how they and/or their governments, organizations, political agendas are appearing in

the news. Given that preoccupation, that inescapable political element in the news, they are naturally always trying to become sources, so that they can influence the correspondents' views and pieces.

Equally important here are those other points we have already touched on: that organizations often are created for the sole purpose of providing journalists with explanations; that in reporting the news, correspondents and journalists may also silence or distort opposition voices; that the media more often follows than leads; that it reinforces more than it challenges conventional wisdom. If it is true, as some analysts have said, that media bias emerges mainly through the constraints of organizational routines and pressures, as opposed to through the intentional ideological perversions of the journalists and editors, an explanation of the individuals and organizations behind the scenes is of the utmost importance.

Let's begin by returning to the overriding importance of U.S. official sources for the American correspondent based in Mexico. One of the justifications heard from American correspondents, for giving more attention to U.S. officials and government agencies, is that Mexican officials are not accessible enough for the reporter to get their points of view and "balance" the story. It is an unavoidable cultural difference, that forces some U.S. news media outlets to take a lot of liberties, As Paul de la Garza tells us:

> This also has to do a lot to do with the culture in Mexico, when you have trouble getting Mexican sources to talk to you, you rely maybe a bit more on American sources for example the DEA or the FBI. They give you information about drug running in Mexico and the Mexican authorities will not return your phone calls, they won't set up interviews, etc. And you write something that perhaps DEA told you in a briefing. [27]

This process whereby reporters seek to justify to themselves the printing or showing a piece on Mexico by acknowledging the power, the recognized authority of the DEA or the FBI, is made all the more inevitable by the recognition that they, the correspondents, are reporting not only on what is going on in

Mexico but also on American government policy, the latter being a primordial mission for them. Over the last fifteen years or so, American government policy toward Mexico has focused quite relentlessly (and hence so has U.S. media coverage) on the annual ritual (which finally ended in 2001) of certification: of certifying that Mexico is cooperating with the U.S. in its war against drugs. As former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, James Jones, points out:

> You could predict within a couple of months of certification that you are going to have a whole range of bad stories about Mexico, because certain law enforcement agencies in Washington who are not competent to catch their criminals either in the United States or Mexico would start leaking information and documents that were supposed to be classified. And if a reporter came to me and asked a question and I would put it into context, even if I understood the reporting requirements of that reporter because of my own background, because I was representing the United States government somehow I was tainted, whereas a law enforcement agency representing the United States government was honest and straightforward. [28]

This "hidden agenda" of U.S. government agencies -- particularly law-enforcement agencies -- is one of the prime suspects in a "conspiracy" against Mexico by Mexican journalists, politicians, and intellectuals, and a reinforcer of the "traditional" view of the U.S. coverage of Mexico.

Of course the most common form of news-related politics, or behind-the-scenes strategy, is "leaking." One could define this practice as the release of classified information by government, nongovernmental, and corporate officials to newspapers and TV news programs, with the objective of affecting both policymaking and public opinion. During the Salinas administration, for example, Salinas's press director, José Carreño-Carlón, was involved in a "leaking battle" with some U.S. government agencies and officials over influencing public opinion in Mexico and especially in the United States, to pass the

NAFTA agreement. One very important subject was of privatization of the Mexican oil giant PEMEX. Here is Carreño-Carlon on the subject:

> I don't know who it was in 1993 who leaked information about the presumed agreement of the Mexican government to include the Mexican oil in NAFTA negotiations. Because the U.S. side wanted to include the oil issue but negotiators in Mexico were not willing to do that, and therefore American negotiators leaked information to put pressure on the Mexican side. And it created a very difficult political atmosphere in Mexico, and could have caused domestic problems. I think it is a good example of news management by the government to put pressure on negotiations. [29]

On the American side, former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, James Jones, provides us with an excellent description of how the American embassy worked, and how it was affected by leaks from other agencies of the U.S. government:

> Whenever we had a situation of raw intelligence coming to us that had to be forwarded on to Washington, I would bring our entire team, all law enforcement agencies, all intelligence-gathering agencies, into the "bubble," which is the hermetically sealed room where nobody can eavesdrop on you. And we would go around, and taking into consideration that my level of evidence is the basic minimum for any lawyer, I would ask each person: "Would you give that to a Grand Jury?" It could just be rumor. If it did not meet that test, we took a strong opposition to that information, or disagreed with that information, recommending that it should not be taken seriously. Well, the raw intelligence went to Washington anyway, and it would float around the city. And people in Washington who had a different preconceived idea of what Mexico was all about, if they could not win the policy debates inside the administration, they immediately went to the press and leaked it. And they were more credible than someone at the State Department, the

> Justice Department, the Treasury Department who said "that was a rumor," that it had been analyzed and deemed inaccurate. [30]

While there was, as we have seen, leaking going on the Mexican side of the border as well, the analyst of the de la Madrid and Salinas administrations is more impressed by the careful choreographing of news which distinguished the latter from the former. For clearly, Carlos Salinas had learned his media lessons well, by seeing how totally incapable the de la Madrid administration was to confront the spectre of U.S. news media, and by the mainly negative images of Mexico projected in the selected newspapers. Thus, right from the moment that Salinas took power, Mexico began to turn from an inward-looking and isolated country to an outward-looking country that depended heavily on international public opinion.

An essential component of Salinas's open press politics and aggressive marketing campaign on behalf of a "new Mexico," was his portrayal of Mexico as being wide open to investors. Thus, one of the Salinas administrations' chief concerns was to design a media program that would project the best possible images and aspects of Mexico. As Carreño-Carlon points out,

> During those years there were specific news and you had to cover them by selecting some specific topics and reports. This way is how we constructed the [new] image and also by denying other issues. For example, in 1994 we designed a news management strategy to bring an image of a modern Mexico. You obviously gave more importance to the image of a new and modern Mexico, and not to the other things that were happening. This was not because they were not in the news. For example the guerrilla in Chiapas. If you had read Proceso in 1992, there were already notes about armed groups there. So, what I am saying here, is that by selecting certain events you draw the trend and what American people understand as a reality. All the notes of some other Mexico, of some other things were already in the air, but they were just ignored." [31]

An even more detailed description of the inner workings of this behind-the-scenes strategy designed during the Salinas administration is offered by Antonio Ocaranza, former International Press Director for the Zedillo administration, when talking about the consistency of the message and the breaking with the dual language (which points towards a keen understanding of globalization through the media) in the Mexico-U.S. relationship:

> Bringing down the walls between domestic and international issues, that is precisely what happened in NAFTA. It would have been a catastrophe if we had a very nationalistic language indoors and a different one for the foreign press. For example, when Mexico's NAFTA chief negotiator said to the Mexican press that it did not matter if the U.S. Congress did not pass NAFTA because Mexico "would continue to grow," a Senator from Ohio, who was a staunch critic of NAFTA, introduced the story with the statement in the Congressional record. He asked, "If Mexico is going to grow anyway, why should we get NAFTA passed?" We immediately realized that Mexico could not have a language for Mexicans and another for the foreign press. We also learned that the NAFTA opponents were reading the Mexican dailies as avidly as the US newspapers. . . I think also that the last thing we learned is that it helps to have help from your friends. NAFTA is one of the cases in which both governments in Mexico and U.S. were working on a single agenda, trying together to get Congress to pass NAFTA. Mexico and the U.S. had different interests, and they were opposed in certain places, but it was also obvious that they were willing to convince governments to pass the same legislation. . . It all ended in Chiapas. I refer to Chiapas as the end of this NAFTA paradigm for two reasons: one because it was one of communication effectiveness that the government could not counter and it was paradoxical because it had been so effective communicating before. But secondly because NAFTA had already passed through the U.S. Congress in November, so that core idea that integrated many of

> the actions of the government just collapsed. I mean, when NAFTA passed, and if your single most important occupation was to get NAFTA passed, then things began to unravel. [32]

The key point we need to take away from these statements by Carreño-Carlón and Ocaranza, two officials who designed Mexico's foreign media policy for a good part of the 1990s, is that there was a sustained media strategy in place designed to achieve a single objective: the passing of NAFTA. Toward that goal were working not just the Presidency of Mexico but also such other key ministries as Commerce, *Hacienda* (Treasury), *Gobernación* (Interior), and Foreign Relations. In fact, both scheduled and emergency inter-ministerial meetings were held, to discuss this media strategy and adapt it to new events. Specific newspaper and magazine articles and TV clips were discussed, as were particular organizations and correspondents. Commerce Minister Jaime Serra Puche and Treasury Minister Pedro Aspe were most prominent in this regard, during the NAFTA-debate years.

There were also new strategies designed to counter the obstacles to Salinas's full legitimacy and further the acceptance of NAFTA, because the echoes of criticism -- of a rigged election in 1988 and a opposition to urgently needed political reform -- against his government had reached the U.S. mainstream press. As Jorge Castañeda points out, one strategy was based on associating any critical positions vis-à-vis the Mexican government with party positions, above all with the nationalistic and leftist ones that had emerged out of the Cuauhtemoc Cárdenas movement, and to suggest that anyone expressing a criticism of Mexico in the United States was voicing a merely irrational opposition to Salinas's ideas and projects. Another was to attract new actors of public opinion to speak positively of the Mexican government in the United States. This effort translated, according to Castañeda, into a sort of "black list" of intellectuals and critics of the Salinas agenda, and was in fact very successful in keeping their views from gaining wide exposure in the U.S. news media. This technique was not only implemented in Mexico with success but also with more or less efficacy in the United States. There various American intellectuals such as John

Womack, Wayne Cornelius, Susan Kaufman, and Sidney Weintraub, were courted with the objective of converting them into media spokespersons-at-large for all the advances that "modernization" and "development" were bringing to Mexico. To that same end, the Mexican government hired very expensive communications and public relations firms to lobby the editorial boards of the main newspapers, the broadcasting companies, and the Hollywood studios. [33]

It is striking that not a single mention was made, in the reporting of the selected newspapers I have analyzed, of all of these behind-the-scenes media maneuverings on the part of the Salinas administration. Granted, a good deal of attention was paid to such matters as Televisa's pro-PRI stance and the practice of *chayote* (bribing journalists), and other long-held-to corrupt practices by which the official spheres maintained hegemony on the media spheres of Mexico. But there was never a word uttered of this "black list" being concocted by officials within the Salinas administration, even though any well-attuned foreign correspondent could and should have picked up on it. It reminds us what Tim Padgett said about Salinas at the beginning of this article, about how editors thousands of miles away became enamored of his personality because the market "liked him", because he was "selling so well" in the United States, because he was "just like us."

7. Conclusion

All too often, even the experts and scholars who are well versed in Mexico-U.S. relations don't really understand the daily realities, or appreciate the difficulties, of the U.S. news media personnel covering Mexico. Thus it has been my goal in this paper: to provide the reader with a better idea of what we can reasonably expect of this world, given all of its constraints, codes, interests, and networks. This approach has the advantage of bringing into sharper contrast each cultural and sociopolitical element that the U.S. news media personnel has to deal with when covering Mexico. Then too, it helps one to see which bits of

coverage lead Mexicans to perceive in them either a "traditional/prejudicial" or a "new" and more democratic approach to the media treatment of their nation.

What my analysis has, I hope, made clear, is that there is an asymmetrical relationship between the mainstream news media outlets of these two countries. That is, the U.S. news media has become a far more concrete influence in Mexican reality and socioeconomic discourse than vice versa. This fact itself has provided the negative, traditionalist view with a justification to recreate itself from time to time. The asymmetry (and the traditionalist justification) is revealed, above all, in the way Mexican nationalism emerges as almost a knee-jerk reaction to any U.S. influence on Mexico, as contrasted with the average American's clear, if unstated, belief that Mexico amounts to little more than a footnote in his/her own nation's history. It is revealed almost as much, however, in the fact that Mexican intellectuals and journalists have used the U.S. news media to advance their personal or group interests inside Mexico, whereas no renowned American politician, scholar, or journalist has, one presumes, ever used the Mexican media to upgrade his or her standing back home. And finally, one certainly saw the asymmetry at work in the way the Mexican press, until recent years, relied on U.S. correspondents to pose uncomfortable questions to high government officials, and in the "press apartheid" of the Salinas years, whereby U.S. reporters received a much better treatment than their Mexican counterparts.

Beyond the asymmetry and its real and powerful psychological/sociological impact, my study has shown that yes, various aspects of the U.S. news media coverage of Mexico can only be called prejudicial and ethnocentric. I have noted, first, that many news pieces come to life via the "leaks" of U.S. law-enforcement agencies, and become prejudicial or ethnocentric largely simply by being deemed "national security issues" by U.S. news media personnel, and hence beyond reproach. And second, I have made it clear that Mexican views sometimes are ignored due to what many U.S. correspondents and editors call "bad cultural habits," or are never given an airing simply because a politician like Salinas is "liked by the

market." While we doubtless have to resign ourselves to seeing more of all of the above trends in the coming years, that by no means suggests that the U.S. news media coverage of Mexico is frozen in time. To the contrary, since the early 1990s that coverage has not only grown wider but has shown a deeper and better-informed understanding of the country -- as some of the journalists, politicians, and scholars interviewed for this study have attested.

We can use the image of a pendulum to understand the temporary hegemony of either the traditional or the new view of the U.S. news media's coverage of Mexico. It swings towards one or the other view according to a complex mixture of factors such as the different news media outlets' structures and interests, their interpretations of specific events, the similarities and differences in outlook of both the American and Mexican administrations in place at a specific time, and the perceptions of the coverage by the general public. Still, we should be aware of the fact that there is a disconnect between the changing nature of U.S. news media coverage of Mexico, and the far more slowly evolving Mexican view of that coverage. For not only the historical preponderance of the traditional view, but its reinforcement via the opinions of such cultural icons as Octavio Paz, Carlos Fuentes, Jorge Castañeda, and Enrique Krauze, have made it hard for the new view to take root with the Mexican "general public."

It says a lot, I think, about how far the U.S.-Mexico relationship has come in recent years, that the traditional view has now come to seem a bit passé. For no serious cultural critic would now disagree that the view of the United States as an entirely non-cultural entity, the home strictly of hamburgers and cowboys, is just as outmoded as the U.S. view of Mexico as a country mired in a culture of poverty that inevitably spawns governmental corruption, illegal migration, and drug trafficking. Such a view may well have had a use in the past, as a rallying cry for Mexican nationalism, or as a strategy to push American interests in Mexico. There can be no doubt however, given its deep roots, that the traditional view is still the one held by many Mexicans (especially after the policy changes due to the events of 9/11), it leading

them to believe that the new view, asserting that the U.S. news media have been central to the democratization of Mexico is "extremist." Nonetheless, the new view has taken firm hold in the minds of a good number of scholars, financial experts, politicians, and journalists of the new generation, a fact attributable, to a great extent, to the changes in Mexico-U.S. relations brought about by the passage of the NAFTA agreement in 1993.

A word or two also needs to be said here about the two vastly different images of the "good reporter" called up by the traditional and the new visions of U.S. media coverage of Mexico. The traditional school craves to see as the U.S. correspondent in Mexico, a cross-cultural intellectual who embraces both Mexican and American cultures with equal passion. This paragon would not only speak perfect Spanish, but be sensitively aware of all the regions, societies, histories, and modes of artistic expressions that do make Mexico a one-of-a-kind country. While the new school is correspondingly more pragmatic, in that all it seems to hope for is a U.S. news media gradually offering its readers and viewers more balanced stories based on a respectful understanding of the historical, political, and cultural differences between the two nations, it seems to hold an image of U.S. correspondents as agents primordially interested in provoking democratic change in Mexico and elsewhere, because of an "essential" American ideology that proselytizes for democracy in all regions of the world.

This study supports neither of these two opposing Mexican views of the coverage, simply because they are characterized, as was pointed out in the first section of this paper, by visceral or stereotypical explanations The traditional view waits for the coming of a woman or man who will finally project images of Mexico entirely grounded in the historical, sociopolitical, and economic contexts that they (the traditionalists) consider the "proper ones." The emergence of such a correspondent can only be categorized as a utopian wish. The new view is based on the idea that democratic change came to Mexico almost entirely owing to the heightened coverage of Mexico by the U.S. news media back in the 1980s

and early 1990s. I am unable to endorse a view so strictly based on a model of center-periphery cultural diffusion, for to do so would be to minimize the impact of events, ideas, and political movements going on inside Mexico during those decades, these being as important as the U.S. news media's influence, and very likely even more so.

In the present new cycle of U.S. reporting which can be called "the anti-terrorism cycle," it is anybody's guess how an enlightened sort of U.S. correspondent in Mexico is to emerge. For not only would the whole journalistic world have to become academic, scholarly, and cross-cultural, but the U.S. news media would have to outgrow their habit of looking at the world as a mirror, and get beyond their incapacity or unwillingness to validate other countries on their own terms. The U.S. government would have to find its way back to that dawning pre-9/11 moment when it actually did begin to look upon Mexico as the equal partner Mexico so fervently wants to be. Editors would have to defer more often to what their correspondents think is important, as opposed to always being under the thumb of "what the market wants." Sources would have to be truly objective, as opposed to merely seeking to further their own agendas. All of the above is of course in stark contrast to the chief fact that my analysis has brought to light: that the strategies and styles of articulation, the ways the networks work for correspondents, the needs of sources and editors, and the behind-the-scenes politicking, all serve to extend and maintain a status quo, rather than to bring on a new type of reporting capable of drastically altering or weakening the conventional conceptions and perceptions held by the U.S. public of Mexico.

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